MARCH 28, 2005

AN APPEAL TO OUR READERS

IN THESE TIMES

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Negroponte's Dark Past

The case against Bush's new intelligence czar





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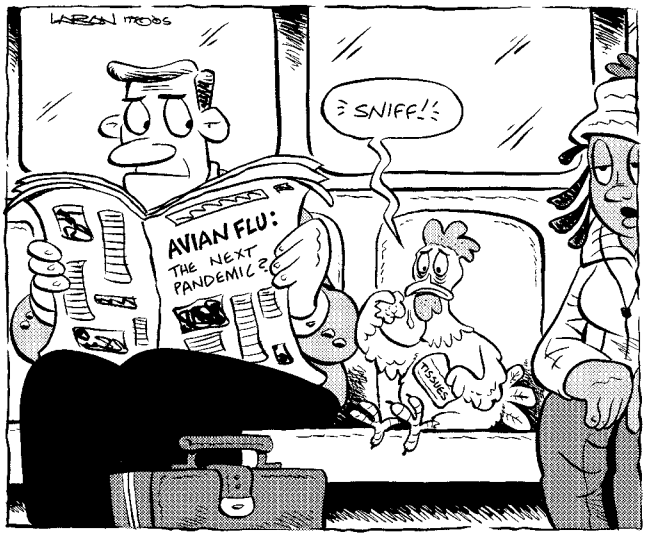
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"[Global warming is] the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."

Senator James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.)

TERRY LABAN



Editorial

Defeated From the Start

By Brian Cook

The Kyoto Protocol to reduce global warming went into effect on February 16. Ratified by 141 nations, the treaty aims to limit the emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gases by 5 to 8 percent in 35 industrialized nations by 2012. The United States, which leads the world by releasing 23 percent of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, is not one of those nations. President Bush started a coalition of the unwilling by withdrawing from the pact two months after taking office.

Few scientists dispute the demonstrable phenomenon of global warming, mankind's contribution to it or its potentially cataclysmic consequences. In 2001, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported the peer-reviewed findings of 2000 climate experts. They noted that the average global surface temperature had risen by .6 degrees Celsius since 1900, and that much of the increase had occurred during the '90s. Varying computer models forecast that the average surface temperature would increase between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees Celsius in the next century.

Rising temperatures, however, are only part of the problem, a fact underscored by a secret Pentagon report on global warming leaked to the London *Observer* in February 2004. The report warned that temperature increases could cause a substantial rise in natural disasters such as floods, droughts and famines. These, in turn, could engender riots, massive displacement, and warfare as countries vied for rapidly dwindling food and energy resources. "Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of life," the report concluded. "Once again, warfare would define human life."

A slew of recent studies lend credence to the Pentagon's fears. In October, scientists found that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere jumped by more than 2 parts per million for the second year in a row. While the rise certainly could be an anomaly, Charles Keeling, who began such observations in 1958, said, "It is also possible that it is the beginning of a natural process unprecedented in the record."

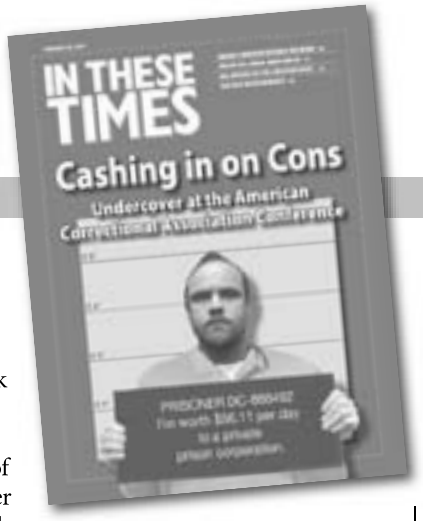
In November, 300 scientists published a multiyear study that found the Arctic was warming twice as fast as the rest of the world. It was this study that prompted Rajendra Pachauri, the head of the IPCC, to tell a conference on January 22: "We are risking the ability of the human race to survive." Pachauri's statements were surprising, as the Bush administration had heavily lobbied for him to lead the IPCC. The previous chairman, Robert Watson, chief scientist of the World Bank, had been replaced at the behest of the United States, after Exxon had written the White House a memo in 2001 urging his ouster for being too "aggressive."

In the current political constellation, however, it is impossible to be too "aggressive" in combating global warming. Even the Kyoto measures—should they actually be met—are incredibly tame, the equivalent of an alcoholic recognizing his problem and promising to limit his daily intake to a six-pack. (No metaphors outside of suicide by keg stand come to mind for Bush's solution—industry self-regulation.) Kyoto's proposed reduction in current emissions by 5 to 8 percent is a fraction of the 50 to 70 percent reduction that the IPCC believes will ultimately be necessary to stanch global warming. This unhappy fact is why even proponents of Kyoto, like Eileen Claussen of the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, admit that the protocol's "greatest value is symbolic."

Because the inherently destructive nature of corporate capitalism is simply not open for discussion in mainstream circles, similar "symbolic" solutions are routinely proposed for real problems. Within this framework, our choices are always, already false. Democrats timidly tell us: "We can make things a little better." To which Republicans, like Bush, respond, "Oh yeah? Well, we can always make things worse." ■

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Letters



Animal Solidarity

As a longtime reader of *In These Times* I'm not sure which is more offensive—Dave Mulcahey's dismissal of the suffering of animals killed for their fur or his use of the very unkind word "'tards" ("Appall-O-Meter: Over My Dead Beaver," February 28).

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is working hard to create a world in which all of us, regardless of nationality, religion or species, can live in peace. Every single year, millions of animals are crushed in steel-jaw traps or anally electrocuted on fur farms, for something as frivolous as fashion. You don't have to be a vegan to agree that this is indefensible.

People who care about homelessness, poverty, women's rights and other social justice issues should also care about our society's treatment of animals. Because all our talk about being "compassionate" is just that, talk, if we don't change our old ways of doing things and find kinder alternatives when presented with evidence that our actions are causing harm to others.

Readers who would like more information about what fur-bearing animals go through before they're turned into hats, coats and collars should visit FurIsDead.com.

Bruce Friedrich
Director, Vegan Campaigns, PETA
Norfolk, Va.

Unacceptable Behavior

I was stunned to read the first sentence of Dave Mulcahey's column in which he refers to a group of people with whom he disagrees as "'tards." I recall the use of this term—retards—as a frequently used insult when I was in grade school in the 1950s.

In several decades of reading much of the progressive press I have never come across anything as offensive as the use of this expression in *In These Times*.

I was supposed to renew my subscription this month; however, I don't plan to do so now unless or until I receive some response to this issue. I don't wish to have any association with any publication where the use of "retards" as a term of derision is considered acceptable.

Margaret Low
Washington, D.C.

DAVE MULCAHEY RESPONDS

These days, the typical way of apologizing for this kind of thing is to say, "I'm sorry that you were offended by my language." The truth is, though, I meant to be offensive. I believe that it is useful to call foolishness what it is, to hold it up for mockery. That is the point of the column. I don't merely disagree with PETA's grandstanding about presidential beaver hats. I believe it's foolish and counterproductive. It substantiates a certain folklore about animal-rights people and the left in general—a folklore that, in my opinion, plays no small role in American political culture at the moment.

Nonetheless, Low is right. "'tard" is a schoolyard epithet, and a very mean one. I apologize for using it.

Because She Could?

Cynthia Cooper's Viewpoint does not meet your usual standards ("Dems: Because They Can?" February 28). She tells us a few obvious things with no particular insight, then blasts Hillary Clinton and John Kerry for waffling on pro-choice. Fair enough. Nothing we didn't already see on TV, but OK to remind us. But then she takes a confusing and offensive cheap shot. She morphs Hillary and Kerry into "guys" who, in a familiar scenario, lose a barroom fight, "bumble" home and take it out on their girlfriends. Well, I doubt Cooper knows many "guys" who are in the habit of fighting, barrooms or otherwise. So maybe it's a metaphor for something? Felt like gratuitous male-bashing to me.

Horace Albaugh
Hamden, N.Y.

Discreditable Accreditation

I read with great pleasure Silja Talvi's coverage of the American Correctional Association (ACA) conference in Phoenix ("Cashing in on Cons," February 28). I'm an ACA retiree member, which only costs me about $20 yearly. Friends of mine helped organize the protests outside.

For a long time, the ACA wouldn't tell which institutions, if any, failed to pass their accreditation process. Now they indicate that some fail, but they won't release their names.

I'm in contact with whistleblowers from the bulk of the private corporations that operate perhaps 85 percent of the prison beds in the United States. Former staff members have told me just how flawed the accreditation process is. One alleged to have

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FIRE ON THE PRAIRIE

'Fire on the Prairie' is a radio forum exploring politics and ideas with progressive writers, thinkers and activists, sponsored by *In These Times*. Fire on the Prairie features interviews, commentary and reporting on local and national issues, including foreign policy, labor, activism, the environment and the media.

The upcoming show features **Ali Abunimah** of Electronic Intifada and Professor **Norman Finkelstein**, author of *The Holocaust Industry,* on the situation in Israel/Palestine and an interview with **Danielle Chynoweth** of the thriving Urbana-Champaign IMC.

Associate Publisher **Aaron Sarver** and Advertising Director **Emily Udell** produce and host each half-hour monthly show, which broadcasts on WLUW and WHPK in Chicago. Each show is also available for download at **www.fireontheprairie.com**.

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been asked to manufacture missing records for a reaccreditation process, in lieu of the actual records. This included falsifying inmate records so it appeared they received due process in disciplinary procedures. It also included the manufacture of training records, i.e., in firearms training or CPR, that were necessary for the institution to pass. Records are cleaned up and tabbed for supposed "random" review. Very few institutions have follow-up visits for reaccredidation.

Moreover, when an institution is not in compliance, the ACA bends over backward to accommodate the operator.

The for-profits use accreditation as a selling point, as you've discovered. The certification is trumpeted, even though it is a rather low bar that they have to clear. Numerous institutions have passed ACA accreditations shortly before being closed by hosting states or the courts, or losing their contracts. Examples are CCA's Youngstown, Ohio pen, GEO Group's Jena, Louisiana juvenile pen, and Cornell Companies' New Morgan Academy, another juvenile prison.

For-profit prison corportations and state deparments of correction exist in a very symbiotic relationship. States can't see that standards are maintained, because they need the for-profits to provide the bed space that taxpayers would balk at funding.

Frank Smith
Bluff City, Kan.

Who Needs the Peace Corps?

Regarding Brian Kehrl's "In Harm's Way" (February 28): Mefloquine (Lariam is the brand name of mefloquine) was never intended to be a prophylactic—until the U.S. government decided to start giving it to Peace Corps volunteers. I served in the Peace Corps and was initially forced to take the pill every week. Not taking it was grounds for immediate dismissal. Although there were other alternatives to this then-experimental (as a prophylaxis) drug, we weren't informed as to them. Lariam was marketed to us as harmless and 100 percent effective against malaria. "If you get malaria, then we will know that you have not been taking it," they told us. It turns out they were wrong. Volunteers throughout West Africa came down with malaria even though they had been faithfully taking the pills—I was one of them.

I've also witnessed the other problems Kerhl cites. In my two years there, I remember one volunteer who had severe insomnia and four who suffered psychotic breaks. Most of us had the bizarre, terrifyingly violent or (if you were lucky) sexual dreams. Not until we cited problems with the drug were we advised as to alternatives.

What I would like to know is, why has there never been a call to study this before? I know the attention stems from soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq refusing to take it, but mefloquine's problems haven't been a secret. Don't the lives of Peace Corps Volunteers count?

Valerie Silensky
Carson City, Nev.

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Frontline

8 Who *really* benefits from private investment accounts?
10 George Solomou says no to the war in Iraq.



Russian Communists protest against the bill on the replacement of social benefits with cash compensations.

YURI KADOBNOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

'Managed' No More

Russians take to the streets to protest the privatization of their social welfare system. *By Fred Weir*

MOSCOW—WHILE AMERICANS DEBATE THE potential impact of Social Security privatization, Russians are already reacting to a sweeping overhaul of their system. The protest wave began in early January, when thousands of angry pensioners in several cities blockaded roads, occupied government buildings and scuffled with police over cancellation of their traditional welfare benefits. By late February, students, trade unionists and academics were rallying over a wider range of issues, and the five-year period of social calm, often credited to President Vladimir Putin's strategy of "managed democracy," was in shambles.

Putin is not—at least not yet—in serious trouble. But many of his government's draconian plans to privatize Russia's social sphere, including housing, education, health care and public transport, have been thrown into disarray. "They may call it 'adjustment,' or going over to market mechanisms, but this is about slashing government expenditures and removing the life-support systems for millions of people," says Mikhail Delyagin, president of the Institute of Globalization Studies in Moscow. "People are only beginning to realize how deeply affected they will be by these changes. We can expect much bigger protests in the months to come."

The trigger was a new law that kicked in January 1, replacing a multitude of in-kind benefits enjoyed by Russia's 30 million pensioners with a single cash payment. The canceled services included the right to ride free on public transport, discount medicines, access to no-cost health clinics, housing subsidies and a range of other privileges. Retirees, who took to the streets in rolling protests that were still going on in late February, complained that the compensation added to their pensions barely made up a fraction of what they'd lost.

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The reform also impacted millions of others, notably disabled people who lost access to free wheelchairs, prosthetics and therapy, guaranteed since Soviet times.

Russian media reported on a spate of assaults by elderly passengers upon bus conductors who demanded fares, highlighting the rage felt by some at losing the right to ride for free. "Many older people will feel isolated now, like they can't afford to travel to visit family and friends like they used to," says Valentin Makarov, an 84-year-old World War II veteran.

Makarov did the math and joined hundreds of others to blockade the main road into Moscow from the suburb of Khimki in January. He says his monthly pension of 2,300 rubles (about $80 U.S.) was increased by 450 rubles ($15 U.S.). But his apartment maintenance charges alone jumped by 35 per cent, or 300 rubles ($10 US), and he must now pay 600 rubles twice a month for medicine he needs. "If we have to pay to use public transport, that will be another 600 rubles a month at least," he says. "There is no way to make ends meet, and the few things we could rely on to be free have been taken away."

According to a calculation made by Communist lawmakers, the full value of promised state benefits to some 100 million needy Russians totaled one and a half trillion rubles, or about $50 billion U.S. But last year only 550 billion rubles (about $18 billion U.S.) was actually paid out to fund the system. "The budget for 2005 provides only 160 billion rubles (about $5 billion), or more than a threefold reduction," says Vladimir Kashin, a leading Communist deputy of the Duma, Russia's parliament. "We are looking at a full-scale attack on the needs of the majority of people."

Russian authorities were quick to blame opposition agitators for the unrest. But, ironically, even the powerful Communist Party—whose membership is mainly pensioners—appears to have been blindsided by January's initial wave of protest. The Communists and other opposition groups, such as the liberal Yabloko party, are now involved and planning coordinated nationwide actions.

The Kremlin has reacted by criticizing the government for its "clumsy" implementation of the reforms, increasing cash payments and temporarily restoring some benefits. It's offered special compensation boosts for war veterans, whom Putin hopes will join him on Red Square for a gala celebration of the 60th anniversary of the USSR's victory over Nazi Germany on May 9. The vets have threatened a boycott, which could be politically devastating.

And discontent appears to be spreading. Students have held their own rallies over a proposed law canceling all military deferments that the Kremlin hoped might stave off the Russian army's collapse. After the protests, the defense minister postponed the measures until later this year. "There's a lot of ferment among students now, and not just over the threat of being dragged into the army," says Oleg Orlov, an organizer for the Students Defense League, one of several radical movements said to be proliferating on Russian campuses. "It's getting impossible to obtain the free education guaranteed in the Russian constitution. Everything is being commercialized, with the result that poor students are being forced out. We could see students pour into the streets this spring, just like they did in Ukraine."

Scholars have demonstrated over meager state support for science, professional drivers rallied over the rising cost of gasoline, and a quarter million Russians took part in a Communist Party/trade union-sponsored "day of protest" on February 12 to demand the reforms be rolled back. A January survey conducted by the Defense Ministry found that 80 percent of military personnel are "dissatisfied" over the reforms, which canceled their free rides on public transport and curtailed their access to food rations and other non-cash benefits.

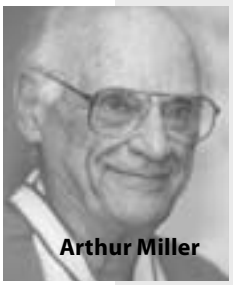
The Kremlin says it's still on track to introduce a sweeping housing reform at the beginning of next year—potentially far more explosive—that will privatize most municipal services and require tenants to pay market prices for utilities and maintenance of their flats. Last year, the pro-Kremlin majority in the Duma passed Russia's first-ever eviction law, so people can now be dispossessed for chronic non-payment of heat, electricity or other bills.

"People are expecting the worst," says Valery Fyodorov, director of the state-run VTsIOM public opinion agency. "The reforms have barely begun, but all our polls show that people are already deeply suspicious. They don't expect anything good from government, and this is a very big problem." ■

IN MEMORIAM

Susan Sontag and Arthur Miller

Dr. Marc Leeds, PhD, an English teacher and old friend of mine, albeit 30 years my junior, recently asked me what he might say to his students about the writers Arthur Miller and Susan Sontag, both of whom had died very recently, both friends of mine.


Arthur Miller

I said that the fact of Miller's having been widely and deeply mourned as a great person dated back to a time, before television, when a legitimate theater might still suddenly become a church with a rapt congregation, in which one heard and saw a great sermon preached. Miller created two such sermons, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*. Tennessee Williams did it at least twice, with the *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Eugene O'Neill did it at least twice with *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into NIght*. Thornton Wilder did it at least once with *Our Town*. Oscar Wilde did it at least once with the funniest sermon ever preached, which is *The Importance of Being Earnest*.


Susan Sontag

I said Susan Sontag's principal gifts to our civilization were not that easily packaged, but were a brilliant, non-stop commentary on contemporary art practices and their effects on our emotions. She did get off one sound bite in an interview on television, which was to me a stunning sermon in and of itself. She was asked what she had learned from the Holocaust, and she said that 10 percent of any population is cruel, no matter what, and that 10 percent is merciful, no matter what, and that the remaining 80 percent could be moved in either direction.

Miller and Sontag, in addition, were seemingly born with stage presence, were birthright personages. When either of them entered a crowded room, all heads would turn in their direction.

—Kurt Vonnegut

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APPALL-O-METER

6.1 Resource Wars Begin at Home

What happens when high-minded, nonviolent enviro-lefties match their flair for agit-prop against the volatile testosterone of the world's top oil traders? The greens get their asses kicked, that's what.

Thirty-five Greenpeace protesters hatched an elaborate plan to disrupt trading on London's International Petroleum Exchange in February, to coincide with the inauguration of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Using their typical cunning, the protesters infiltrated the trading floor just after lunch, and began rushing around, blowing whistles and horns.



Enraged and no doubt amply lubricated by lunchtime quaffing, the traders counterattacked, punching and kicking protesters back onto the street. According to the *Guardian*, traders toppled a large metal bookcase on some protesters, injuring a few. One protester was dragged down a corridor by his hair, taking kicks and blows along the way.

The Greenpeacers hewed to their line of nonviolence throughout the fracas, but many expressed shock at their unkind reception on the trading floor. "We bit off more than we could chew. They were just Cockney barrow boy spivs. Total thugs," one protester told the *Times*. "I've never seen anyone less amenable to listening to our point of view."

"They were trying so hard to hit us they were falling over each other," another protester told the *Guardian*.

A trader sought to put his fellows' bad behavior into context, explaining to the *Guardian*, "We were disappointed with security for allowing this commotion just at a time when the [crude] market was pushing higher on the back of reports that a missile had been fired at Iran." Timing is everything.

1.9 Enlightenment in the Red States

Larry A. Mumper, member of the Ohio Senate from the metropolis of Marion, has introduced an "academic bill of rights for higher education" aimed at freeing the academy in that state from the occult hand of political correctness. Mumper explained the problem with the nation's professoriate to the *Columbus Dispatch*: "Eighty percent or so of them are Democrats, liberals or socialists or card-carrying Communists."

4.3 Gunning for Grannies

You've probably never heard of USA Next, but you will. As the *New York Times* reports, this group, founded by right-wing graybeard Richard Viguerie and funded by oil and pharmaceutical money, plans to roll out a $10 million ad campaign promoting George Bush's Social Security boondoggle. They have hired the brains behind the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

And their campaign? Waging war against AARP, the senior citizens lobby group. "They are the boulder in the middle of the highway to personal savings accounts," explained USA Next honcho Charlie Jarvis. "We will be the dynamite that removes them."

—Dave Mulcahey

Who Benefits?

The big winners of Private Investment Accounts. *By Jack Rasmus*

George W. Bush's plan to privatize Social Security has nothing to do with enhancing workers' retirement income. Rather, it is a scheme to redistribute money from the majority of people who work to the minority of people who own the banks and brokerage firms.

The vehicle for enabling the fundamental transformation of Social Security—and transfer of wealth—is the Private Investment Account (PIA). PIAs will allow current participants in the Social Security program to divert up to 4 percent of their present 12.4 percent payroll tax deduction going to the Social Security Trust Fund and invest it in individualized 401(k)-type accounts managed by private financial institutions.

Diverting that percentage of payroll taxes to PIAs will generate what are called "transition costs" of around $2 trillion over the coming decade. Social Security is a "pay as you go" system, with those working contributing via payroll taxes to provide benefits for those currently retired or disabled. Since Bush has already stated that "the one thing I'm not open-minded about is raising the payroll tax rate" (which would cover the projected shortfall), the only alternatives are either to cut Social Security benefits for future and/or current retirees, or to borrow money in public markets by selling Treasury bonds.

The Bush administration is using the concept of PIAs to sell the whole idea of privatization to the public. They claim that the accounts will result in greater net income at retirement. But will the public really benefit from diverting their Social Security money into PIAs? As they say in financial circles, "let's do the numbers."

To begin with, the historic long run net return on T-Bonds in the Social Security Trust Fund, adjusted for inflation, is around 3 percent. In order for participants to do better by diverting their payroll taxes, they would have to earn more than 3 percent after inflation by investing in stocks in their PIAs. But the rate of return on stock investments may average zero percent or less for years or even decades, as it did between 1901-1921, 1928-1948, or 1962-1982. In normal periods, stocks average 3.7 percent annual returns over the long run, only 0.7 percent more on average than returns in the current system.

A February 4 study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities paints an even darker picture. A worker retiring in 2042 after having earned average compensation would ordinarily receive about $20,000 a year in Social Security benefits. If nothing at all were done to offset a Social Security Fund shortfall due in 2042, and all future benefits were paid to that worker out of payroll taxes at the time, that worker would still receive approximately $18,000 in benefits. With the Bush plan, that same worker would have his benefits reduced to less than $15,000 a year, according to the center's analyses.

So who are the real winners here? The answer is clear: Big Finance.

Congress has already used $1.6 trillion of the Social Security surplus over the last 20 years to cover the general U.S. budget deficit. The diversion of payroll taxes to PIAs means that, at minimum, another $2

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Treasury Secretary John Snow.

MARK WILSON / GETTY IMAGES

trillion would be diverted from the Social Security Trust Fund. The banks, Wall Street brokers, insurance companies, mutual funds and other financial institutions that will manage and manipulate the PIAs will directly benefit. Those financial institutions will charge administrative fees of typically around 2 percent, not to mention a variety of other related charges, such as when a participant switches from one PIA fund to another, leaves or re-enters the workforce or arranges for annuities at retirement.

But the biggest gains to financial institutions will come not from fees but from the interest they'll charge for financing the federal government's borrowing of $2 trillion transition costs. Treasury Secretary John Snow has already indicated that the Bush administration will offer Treasury Bonds to the big financial institutions at above normal rates of interest. Even more potentially lucrative are the revenue and profit streams from reinvesting the several trillion dollars worth of PIA funds they will manage.

Bush and his advisers know they could correct the alleged $3.7 trillion shortfall by 2042 (or 2052) without introducing PIAs, through modest increases in the payroll tax for wealthier taxpayers; an extension of the estate tax, currently scheduled to expire after 2009; or simply reversing Bush's projected $11 trillion tax cuts for millionaires through 2042. But the administration's objective is just the opposite—to dismantle Social Security as we know it and replace it with a totally privatized retirement system that benefits corporate interests. ■

JACK RASMUS *is on the National Executive Board of the National Writers Union. A longer version of this article can be found in his book* The War at Home: The Corporate Offensive from Reagan to Bush, *now available at www.kyklosproductions.com.*

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STEFAN ROUSSEAU / EPA PHOTOS



Letter from a British Soldier

By George Solomou

I AM RESIGNING FROM the Territorial Army because I believe the war in Iraq is wrong. This has not been an easy decision. I have been in the TA for five years—years in which I have learned a lot; won a humanitarian award for helping save the life of a fellow soldier; made many friends; and, I hope, contributed something to this country.

I have no doubt that some of my fellow soldiers will feel I am letting them down. Since I have spoken out against the war in the last few weeks I have had a lot of support from soldiers, but I have also been called a coward. I am a trained medic and there is no doubt my skills could be used in the field to save lives. But after a lot of soul-searching I have concluded my priority must be to try to save lives by taking a public stand against this war.

Of course, when you join the armed forces you have to be prepared to fight. But not any war. Most people in Britain think the war in Iraq is wrong, and that is presumably because all the arguments used to justify it have proved to be hollow. It is now official that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the idea that the war has made the world a safer place is a sick joke.

Soldiers cannot be above moral considerations. Though the British army scandalously tries to hide this fact, the United Nations enshrines the right of members of the armed forces to object and opt out of particular wars on political, religious or moral grounds. Before the war started even our own generals were demanding firm commitments from Tony Blair that there was proof that Saddam Hussein was armed and dangerous. They were worried about the legality of the war. The UN resolutions used to justify the war only had force if Iraq was a threat to the world or to the region. We now know there was no evidence for this. So we are faced with a situation where even the U.N. secretary general, Kofi Annan, has said the war was illegal.

So I am resigning because I don't want to fight a war that is unjustified and illegal. But I also have a deep concern that British soldiers are being used in Iraq. Soldiers from my regiment tell me that much of their work in southern Iraq involves protecting convoys of oil tankers shuttling between Basra and the Kuwaiti border. Their stories have just confirmed my growing cynicism about the motives for the war. I really believe that our foreign policy is being driven by the needs of U.S. power, particularly the need to control the flow of oil.

This is a very bitter thing to say because the troops are suffering. Two close colleagues have suffered permanent injuries in Iraq. Their lives have been shattered and it must be said they have been treated very poorly by the army. Reports suggest that on top of the 80 dead, 7-800 British troops have been seriously wounded. Many more are suffering mental trauma. The experience of the Falklands and the first Gulf war shows that the scars of war run very deep, even among the officially uninjured. I know veterans who struggle daily with post-traumatic stress disorder more than 10 years after seeing active service. It is a scandal that young lives are being lost and ruined just so George Bush can keep control of the oil in the Middle East.

People have said to me that we created this mess, we should sort it out. The Iraqis need many things: they need medical supplies, they need their infrastructure rebuilt, they need jobs. The one thing they don't need is foreign troops on their streets. In fact, it is the presence of U.S. and British troops that is creating the tension and violence, which seems certain to continue regardless of last month's elections. We have become symbols of foreign domination. That is why there is no way we can provide security. Only the Iraqis themselves can do that, and the longer we stay, the more the situation will get out of hand. We must allow the Iraqis to get on with building their own future—even if they make mistakes.

I am resigning as a conscientious objector because I don't want any part of it, and also because I hope my action might just encourage other soldiers to speak out or opt out. ■

GEORGE SOLOMOU *is a lance corporal in the Royal Army Medical Corps, attached to the London Irish Rifles. This is an edited version, first published in* The Guardian*, of the letter he submitted to his commanding officer on February 15.*

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The Clash of the Cults

THE WAR ON TERRORISM DECLARED BY THE United States on radical Islamists is little more than a proxy battle in a war between two cults.

That is the provocative theory emerging from two award-winning investigative journalists from both sides of the Atlantic: Seymour Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for *The New Yorker*, and Adam Curtis, a well-known British documentary filmmaker and producer for the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC).

They are making the case that current animosities between the West and the Islamic world are being fueled by the narrow agendas of two cults: American neoconservatives and al Qaeda.

It was Hersh's exposé on the Abu Ghraib torture scandal in *The New Yorker* in April 2004 that essentially forced CBS to air its "60 Minutes" program on the atrocities, which it had been sitting on for weeks. A veteran reporter with hard-earned access to the internal dynamics of foreign policy formation, Hersh also has closely followed the rise of the neoconservative ideologues that now dominate the U.S. foreign policy apparatus.

At a recent speech before the Steven Wise Free Synagogue in New York, Hersh said, "The amazing thing is, we've been taken over basically by a cult, eight or nine neoconservatives have somehow grabbed the government." He didn't go into the whys and wherefores of this takeover (he has done so, exhaustively, in a *New Yorker* piece published May 5, 2003), but he relayed his distress at the results.

"You do have to wonder what democracy is when it comes down to a few men in the Pentagon and a few men in the White House having their way," he told the Synagogue crowd.

Hersh has been chronicling this takeover in a series of *New Yorker* articles, the latest of which was a January 24 piece about Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's takeover of intelligence functions usually handled by the CIA.

Hersh argues that the neocons' worldview was shaped in large part by the theories of the late Leo Strauss, who taught political philosophy at the University of Chicago in the '40s and '50s. Strauss believed the world to be a hostile place where democracies live in constant danger from hostile elements abroad, Hersh writes, and where those in power often have to deceive their own uncomprehending citizens in order to protect the nation.

He warns that this coterie of Straussians is taking America down a dangerous path that will be hard to reverse. The major features of this path are neocolonialism in the guise of evangelical democracy and hostility to Islam.

Through the influence of this cult, most Americans have been convinced that the modern West is being seriously threatened by a parade of ruthless Islamist terrorists. The Islamists who fit that description are grateful for this grandiose image: the larger their shadow, the greater the terror.

But this notion of a menacing monolith, implacably opposed to Western modernism and threatening mayhem at every airport, is neatly demolished in Curtis' BBC film, *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear.* The three-hour documentary, which first aired on the BBC last October and was repeated in January (available at www.informationclearinghouse.info/video1037.htm), makes a compelling argument that much of what we think we know about international terrorism is a fantasy that has been exaggerated and exploited by politicians.

Curtis attacks the conventional wisdom that there is a well-coordinated network of international terrorists seeking to harm the West. In fact, Curtis argues, radical Islamists were fragmented and losing favor among the Muslim masses until they began to attack the West as a last resort.

This strategy attracted a loose association of disillusioned Islamist militants, he says, but "beyond this small group, bin Laden had no formal organization—until the Americans invented one for him." Curtis argues that the FBI gave bin Laden's rag-tag group the name "al Qaeda" because of legal requirements; a government strategy to prosecute bin Laden in 2001 via the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization laws required the existence of an actual organization.

While the BBC documentary does acknowledge there are Islamist fanatics capable of odious acts of terrorism, it vigorously opposes the view that such freelance radicals comprise an organized terrorist network.

"Wherever one looks for this al Qaeda organization, from the mountains of Afghanistan to the 'sleeper cells' in America, the British and Americans are chasing a phantom enemy," Curtis says.

The British filmmaker argues that the neoconservatives and Islamist radicals are symbiotic rivals, both with a stake in bolstering the image of the other. Both groups have changed the world, he notes, "but not in the way that either intended. Together they created today's nightmare vision of a secret, organized evil that threatens the world." ■

The Power of Nightmares neatly demolishes the notion of a menacing terrorist network, threatening mayhem at every airport.

SALIM MUWAKKIL *is a senior editor at* In These Times, *a contributing columnist to the* Chicago Tribune *and a Crime and Communities Media Fellow of the Open Society Institute.*

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House Call *By Rep. Bernie Sanders*

An Indecent Act

Apparently a lot of people in Congress do not believe that Americans should have the "freedom" to make the choice about what they listen to on the radio or watch on TV.

On February 16, the House passed the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2005 (H.R. 310) by a vote of 389 to 38. This legislation would impose vastly higher fines—up to $500,000—on broadcasters who air so-called indecent material.

What it doesn't do is provide any relief from the vague standard of indecency that the Federal Communications Commission can arbitrarily apply. That means broadcasters, particularly small broadcasters, will have no choice but to engage in a very dangerous cycle of self-censorship to avoid the threat of a fine that could drive some of them into bankruptcy.

If this legislation is enacted, the real victim will be free expression and Americans' First Amendment rights. In a statement I entered into the Congressional Record, John King, president of Vermont Public Television, said, in part:

> While many people assume the new sanctions [of H.R. 310] are aimed at commercial broadcasters, public broadcasters are feeling the effects every day. Public television's educational programming for children has always provided a safe haven. The same public television stations that take such care of their young viewers also respect the intelligence and discretion of their adult viewers to make the best viewing choices themselves. … While there have always been prohibitions against gratuitous indecency, the FCC always took context into account. Now, it seems that context is no longer considered. Much as we might like to invoke our First Amendment rights, we dare not risk the large fine that could come with a single violation.

I am increasingly alarmed by the culture of censorship that is developing in this country. This censorship is being conducted by the corporations that own our increasingly consolidated, less diverse media. And it is being done by the government. The result is an insidious chill on free expression on our airwaves.

I am not a conservative. But on this issue I find myself in strong agreement with Adam Thierer, the director of telecommunications studies at the Cato Institute—a very conservative think tank. He puts forth a commonsense, pro-freedom position:

> Censorship on an individual/parental level is a fundamental part of being a good parent. But censorship at a government level is an entirely different matter because it means a small handful of individuals get to decide what the whole nation is permitted to see, hear or think. I've always been particularly troubled by the fact that so many conservatives, who rightly preach the gospel of personal and parental responsibility about most economic issues, seemingly give up on this notion when it comes to cultural issues.

We have got to stand firmly in opposition to the specter of censorship growing in America. Here are some examples of increased censorship on the airwaves:

- In January 2004, CBS refused to air a political advertisement during the Super Bowl by MoveOn.org that was critical of President Bush's role in creating the federal deficit.
- In November 2004, 66 ABC affiliates refused to air the World War II movie *Saving Private Ryan* for fear that they would be fined for airing programming containing profanity and graphic violence, even though ABC had aired the uncut movie in previous years. This, ironically, was a movie that showed the unbelievable sacrifices that American soldiers made on D-Day fighting for freedom against Hitler, but ABC affiliates around the country didn't feel free to show it.
- In November 2004, CBS and NBC refused to run a 30-second ad from the United Church of Christ because it suggested that gay couples were welcome to their church. The networks felt that it was "too controversial" to air.
- In January, many PBS stations refused to air an episode of the children's show "Postcards with Buster" after Education Secretary Margaret Spellings objected to the show's content, which included Buster, an 8-year-old bunny rabbit, learning how to make maple syrup from a family with two mothers in Vermont.
- An episode of PBS' "Antiques Roadshow" that included appraisal of an antique nude lithograph was edited so as not to offend.

A lot of people in Congress talk about freedom, but apparently they do not believe that Americans should have the "freedom" to make the choice about what they listen to on radio or watch on TV. There are a lot of people in Congress who talk about the intrusive role of "government regulators," but today they want government regulators to tell radio and TV stations what they can air. That is wrong. Enacting the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2005 will make America a less free society.

What America is about is not necessarily liking what someone has to say, but defending their right to say it. Today, it is Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction or Howard Stern's vulgarity. What will it be tomorrow? ■

BERNIE SANDERS, *Vermont Independent, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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Dear *In These Times* Reader,

In his book *The Republican Noise Machine*, David Brock writes that in the last 30 years hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in building a right-wing media infrastructure that "has penetrated, pressured, co-opted, and subdued the mainstream media into accommodating conservatism."

He continues: "A deliberate, well-financed, and expressly acknowledged communications and deregulatory plan was pursued by the right wing for more than 30 years—in close coordination with Republican Party leaders—to subvert and subsume journalism and reshape the national consciousness through the media, with the intention of skewing American politics sharply to the right. The plan has succeeded spectacularly."

Right-wing Republicans now set the nation's agenda. And they have seeded, cultivated and nurtured the perception that the mainstream media is liberal.

You know that *In These Times* is a rarity—a not-for-profit publication that speaks to the concerns of everyday Americans and challenges those in power to do the same.

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For now, supporting independent media like *In These Times* is one of the best ways to ensure that progressive voices like yours will be heard.

"Existing progressive alternative media," Brock writes, "need more financial support from the progressive community so that they may more effectively compete with the massively subsidized right-wing media."

You can help *In These Times* provide an alternative to the right's media juggernaut by contributing today. Those of you who are already donors will soon be receiving letters asking you to make a contribution to *In These Times*. Please respond as quickly and generously as you can.

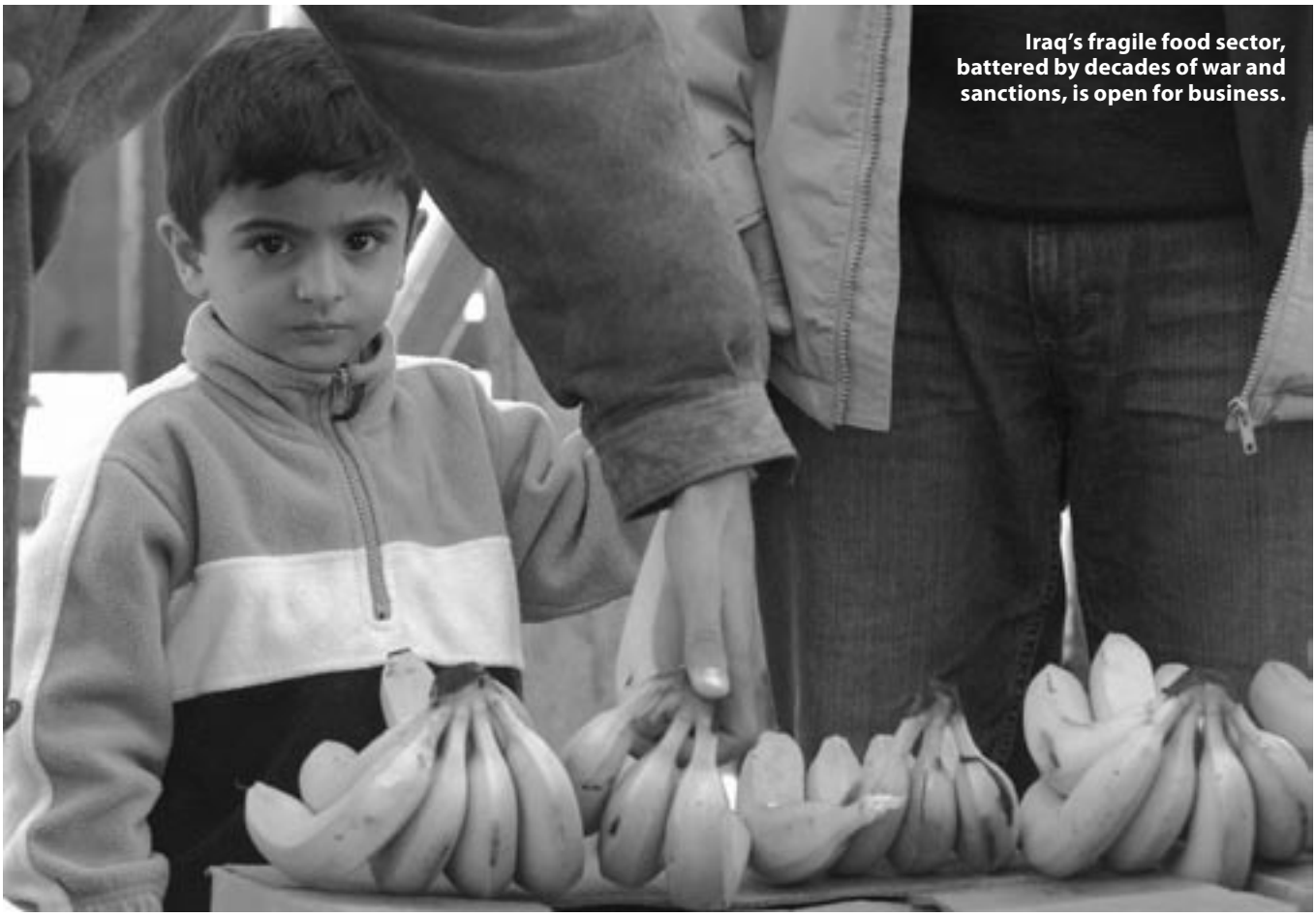
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Iraq's fragile food sector, battered by decades of war and sanctions, is open for business.

Plowing for Profits

BY CHRISTOPHER D. COOK

U.S. agribusiness eyes Iraq's fledgling markets

Iraq's Fertile Crescent, the fabled birthplace of ancient grains and agricultural civilization, is emerging as a new market opportunity for American agribusiness. Even as U.S. officials tout gracious shipments of food aid and technical assistance to thankful Iraqi farmers, the agenda articulated by government agencies and industry groups is clear—Iraq's fragile food sector, battered by decades of war and sanctions, is open for business.

U.S. exports of wheat, rice, soybean products and poultry to Iraq all ballooned in 2003 after sanctions were lifted. Freshly minted contracts show American wheat exporters are expanding sales (albeit still small) to Iraq, and congressional testimony by industry groups shows their keen interest in recapturing what was once, through the late '80s, a profitable destination for U.S. crops.

And the American project extends beyond prying this revived market away from Australia and other nations that did agricultural business with Saddam Hussein during the sanction decade. The broader agricultural plan includes privatizing state-run food companies, phasing out farm subsidies, boosting food prices and, possibly, introducing genetically altered seeds that are patented and not reusable—all moves that dovetail with an overall neoliberal strategy to open up and deregulate Iraq's markets.

This broader push for privatization is reflected in the language of Order 81, one among 100 legal orders left behind by U.S. administrator L. Paul Bremer's departed regime. This order, which covers patents and copyrights, including "protected plant varieties," calls for a "transition from a non-transparent centrally planned economy to a free-market economy."

Patenting the future

Order 81 paves the way for genetically modified crops (GMOs), stating: "Farmers shall be prohibited from reusing seeds of protected varieties." The order, exposed by Focus on the Global South and GRAIN in an October 2004 report, does not require Iraqi farmers to use GMOs. But it etches into Iraqi law WTO-style patent protections for genetically engineered crops—assuring U.S. GMO-producing firms a legally protected niche in the country's future.

Agricultural giant Monsanto, for one, claims to have no interest. "For the record,

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Monsanto has no plans to introduce biotechnology in Iraq," insists company spokesman Chris Horner. "It doesn't fit with our business plans." If security and other factors improve, Horner says, "there could be opportunities for conventional seeds and chemicals. … I would not characterize it as an emerging market." The outcry about Order 81 has "no basis in fact," says Horner. "How many new patented seed varieties are there in Iraq? Zero."

But the law was enacted only last April, and activists say its implications are far-reaching. "If seeds had to be patented, there would have to be significantly more money in the farmer sector," says Antonia Juhasz, former program director for the International Forum on Globalization, who is writing a book about Iraq. "Only those who can afford to patent or buy patented seeds would remain farmers." At the same time, she suggests, the order establishes an economic beachhead into the rest of the region for the GMO industry.

Deborah James, global economy director at Global Exchange, calls seed-saving prohibitions like Order 81 "one of the biggest assaults on food security." Farmers, she explains, would be forced "to buy from multinational corporations like Monsanto, instead of doing what farmers have done throughout the millennia: guaranteeing food security by saving seed varieties."

Despite Monsanto's assurances, James cautions, "corporations never announce their plans to flood markets with genetically modified food." Under NAFTA, "there wasn't supposed to be genetically modified corn coming to Mexico," yet GMO corn from the United States was discovered there in 2001. This February, a coalition of 70 groups from six Central American and Caribbean countries announced that GMOs—specifically, the infamous StarLink maize not authorized for human consumption—had been detected in U.N. food aid and commercial imports from the United States.

Liberation—for U.S. commodities

Meanwhile, the $100 million agricultural reconstruction project undertaken by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aims to get the government out of food production. "The idea is to make this completely a free market," says Doug Pool, agriculture irrigation and environment specialist with the USAID's office of Iraq Reconstruction.

The USAID goal—mirroring U.S. and WTO policies—is to help the new government phase out farm subsidies. "The Minister of Agriculture has been quite good in doing that," says Pool. State enterprises, such as the Mesopotamia Seed Co., "need to be spun off and privatized," he said.

Other USAID efforts include an "agricultural mechanization program," deploying U.S. companies such as Case New Holland to rehabilitate Iraq's dilapidated farm machinery. While this may seem like a goodwill gesture, it has its payoffs. "Of course, the companies themselves will eventually sell replacement machinery and parts," adds Pool, "so it will be a good deal for them."

Indeed, while Pool emphasizes USAID's project to expand and revitalize Iraq's farm sector, U.S. commodity exporters are hungrily eyeing renewed market opportunities—which could undercut Iraq's farmers.

> The broader agricultural plan includes privatizing state-run food companies, phasing out farm subsidies, boosting food prices and, possibly, introducing genetically altered seeds.

"Iraq was once a significant commercial market for U.S. farm products, with sales approaching $1 billion in the 1980s," former agriculture secretary Ann Veneman told a conference of farm broadcasters in 2003. "It has the potential, once again, to be a significant commercial market."

According to John King, vice chairman of the USA Rice Council, Iraq was the top market for U.S. rice in the late '80s, prior to the 1991 Gulf war. "The U.S. rice industry wants to play a major role once again in supplying rice to Iraq," King told the U.S. House Agriculture Committee this past June. "With the current challenges facing the U.S. rice industry … renewed Iraqi market access could have a tremendous impact in value-added sales."

King added: "The liberation of Iraq in 2003 by coalition forces has brought freedom to the Iraqi people. The resumption of trade has also provided hope for the U.S. rice industry."

The American wheat industry is also poised for a new export banquet. That industry—which at one point in the '70s had a 100 percent market share in Iraq—recently secured its first exports there in years. "Iraq is under a lot of pressure to buy wheat from the United States," said a disheartened executive from the Grains Council of Australia, a top wheat exporter to Iraq.

History's lessons

Critics of American agribusiness warn that this confluence of privatization policies, GMO-friendly patent protections and U.S. exports is a volatile mix that could further destabilize war-ravaged Iraqi farmers while producing few benefits for their American counterparts.

"Any profit that's made will go to the companies that export it to Iraq, not to farmers," says George Naylor, Iowa farmer and president of the National Family Farm Coalition. Foisting Iraqi growers into a privatized free market will "destroy" small family farms there, just as similar policies have done in the United States, Naylor insists.

Mark Ritchie, president of the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, argues that the U.S.-led overhaul of Iraq's agriculture is a "completely ideological" endeavor that ignores historic lessons. Well-recorded failings of large-scale industrial agriculture in the former Soviet Union and in the United States, he says, "haven't deterred people who ideologically think that's the way to go, so we're going to repeat the mistakes again if we have a chance."

Ultimately, Ritchie says, American taxpayers may also pay a stiff price for any wartime export bubble. He points to the Vietnam War, during which the American rice industry was temporarily enriched by huge exports. Then the postwar market evaporated, and the industry was propped up with big subsidy payments. "The U.S. can create a giant export flow for underpriced commodities, and taxpayers can just pay through the nose," Ritchie warns. "The dangers to producers there are real, and the dangers to American taxpayers are equally real, and Vietnam has shown us how devastating this is." ■

CHRISTOPHER D. COOK *is an award-winning investigative journalist and author of* Diet for a Dead Planet: How the Food Industry Is Killing Us *(www.dietforadeadplanet.com).*

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Negroponte's

The case against Bush's new intelligence czar

BY ROBERT PARRY



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Dark Past

George W. Bush's choice of John Negroponte to be the first U.S. intelligence czar signals that Washington is heading down the same road that has led to earlier American intelligence failures and controversies—from politicizing analysis to winking at human rights abuses.

Although Negroponte's nomination is expected to sail through the Senate, one question that might be worth asking about his tenure as U.S. ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985 is: "Were you oblivious to the Honduran military's human rights violations and drug trafficking, or did you just ignore these problems for geopolitical reasons?"

Negroponte either oversaw a stunningly inept U.S. intelligence operation at the embassy in Tegucigalpa—missing major events occurring under his nose—or he tolerated atrocities that included torture, rape and murder, while slanting intelligence reports to please his superiors in Washington.

Whichever it is—incompetence or complicity—it is hard to understand how Negroponte, the current U.S. ambassador to Iraq, can be expected to fix the intelligence flaws revealed by the Bush administration's failure to connect the dots before the 9/11 terror attacks or to avert the scandalous use of torture on Muslim suspects captured in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite the bipartisan praise Negroponte's nomination has elicited, a clear-eyed look at his record suggests that the Bush administration intends to continue making two demands on the U.S. intelligence community: that analysts wear rose-colored glasses when assessing U.S. policies and that field operatives turn a blind eye to atrocities committed by U.S. allies or American interrogators.

A history of oversight

Given the human rights records of the Honduran military and the Nicaraguan contras who set up shop in Honduras during Negroponte's tenure as ambassador the early '80s, he will have no moral standing as a public official who repudiates abusive interrogation techniques and brutal counterinsurgency tactics. Indeed, some cynics might suggest that's one of the reasons Bush picked him.

Negroponte's work in Honduras means, too, that he will come to his new job with a history of forwarding inaccurate intelligence to Washington and leaving out information that would have upset the upper echelon of the Reagan-Bush administration. For his part, Negroponte, who is now 65, has staunchly denied knowledge of "death squad" operations by the Honduran military in the '80s.

In 1983, in another move that helped the Honduran military and the contras, the Reagan-Bush administration closed down the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) office at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, just as Honduras was emerging as an important base for cocaine transshipments to the United States.

"Elements of the Honduran military were involved ... in the protection of drug traffickers from 1980 on," is how a Senate Foreign Relations investigative report, issued in 1989 by a subcommittee headed by Sen. John Kerry, put it. "These activities were reported to appropriate U.S. government officials throughout the period. Instead of moving decisively to close down the drug trafficking by stepping up the DEA presence in the country and using the foreign assistance the United States was extending to the Hondurans as a lever, the United States closed the DEA office in Tegucigalpa and appears to have ignored the issue."

Negroponte either oversaw a stunningly inept U.S. intelligence operation at the embassy in Tegucigalpa or he tolerated atrocities while slanting intelligence reports to please his superiors in Washington.

It's unclear what role Negroponte played in shutting down the DEA office in Honduras during his time as U.S. ambassador, but it is hard to imagine that a step of that significance could have occurred without at least his acquiescence.

Negroponte's ambassadorship also coincided with the evolution of the Nicaraguan contra forces from a small band under the tutelage of Argentine intelligence officers into an irregular army supported by the CIA, and later by a secret operation inside the White House run by National Security Council aide Oliver North.

Recent revelations

Despite several investigations into what became known as the Iran-Contra scandal, many documents about Negroponte's involvement remained classified, outside public knowledge. Some of that information bubbled to the surface in September 2001 when Negroponte was facing confirmation to be Bush's ambassador to the United Nations.

In a Senate floor speech before Negroponte won confirmation, Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) said, "The picture that emerges in analyzing this new information is a troubling one." Summarizing the new documents from the State Department and CIA, Dodd said the evidence pointed to the fact that from 1980 to 1984, the Honduran military committed most of the country's

ROBERT PARRY *broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the '80s for the Associated Press and* Newsweek. *His new book,* Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq, *can be ordered at secrecyandprivilege.com, as can his 1999 book,* Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.' *A version of this article appeared on ConsortiumNews.com.*

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hundreds of human rights abuses. The documents reported that some Honduran military units, trained by the United States, were implicated in "death squad" operations that employed counterterrorist tactics, including torture, rape, and assassinations against people suspected of supporting leftist guerrillas in El Salvador or leftist movements in Honduras.

Dodd criticized Negroponte's earlier Senate testimony. In response to questions about one of these units, Battalion 316, Negroponte had said, "I have never seen any convincing substantiation that they were involved in death squad-type activities."

"Given what we know about the extent and nature of Honduran human rights abuses, to say that Mr. Negroponte was less than forthcoming in his responses to my questions is being generous," said Dodd. "I was also troubled by Ambassador Negroponte's unwillingness to admit that—as a consequence of other U.S. policy priorities—the U.S. Embassy, by acts of omissions, end[ed] up shading the truth about the extent and nature of ongoing human rights abuses in the 1980s."

"The Inter-American Court of Human Rights had no such reluctance in assigning blame to the Honduran government during its adjudication of a case brought against the government of Honduras [in 1987]," Dodd said. "The Court found that 'a practice of disappearances carried out or tolerated by Honduran officials existed between 1981-84' … Based upon an extensive review of U.S. intelligence information by the CIA Working Group in 1996, the CIA is prepared to stipulate that 'during the 1980-84 period, the Honduran military committed most of the hundreds of human rights abuses reported in Honduras. These abuses were often politically motivated and officially sanctioned.'"

However, when Bush nominated Negroponte to be ambassador to Iraq in 2004, Dodd and other Democrats largely dropped their objections. The *National Catholic Reporter*, which had covered the right-wing persecution of Catholic

In These Times has been following the career of John Negroponte

MAY 4, 1983

CIA's Covert Activities Are in the Open

By Jack Epstein and J.H. Evans

THE DECISION TO move against Nicaragua was probably taken shortly after Reagan took office. Judging by his campaign rhetoric, the Sandinistas were seen not only as bad examples, but also as willing proxies for Soviet and Cuban support of all leftist insurgent activity in the region. The destruction of the Nicaraguan revolution was perceived as crucial to the maintenance of U.S. hegemony in Central America. …

Honduras, specifically the U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa, the capital, was chosen as the headquarters for the operation. The embassy was hurriedly upgraded from a low priority class 4 to class 2, and as many as 50 CIA operatives were sent in under official cover to analyze data flowing in from spies. Subsequent press accounts have said that more than 150



agents are now working in Honduras, with dozens more in neighboring countries. This includes between 50 and 60 U.S. military personnel, most of them of Cuban or Puerto Rican descent, who are in charge of daily contact with counterrevolutionary fighters.

To oversee the operation Reagan appointed a former Saigon political officer, John Negroponte, who like his counter part in Guatemala 30 years earlier, John Peurifoy, has become the theater commander of the CIA's war.

Negroponte immediately began to work closely with Honduran Army Commander-in-Chief General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, an Argentine and U.S.-trained officer known for his almost messianic anti-Communist views. … Negroponte and the CIA worked through Argentine advisers who helped train the counterrevolutionary groups and launder financial support.

APRIL 2, 2001

In From the Cold War

Bush's pick for U.N. Ambassador has some spooky stuff on his resume

By Terry Allen

LIKE SPOOKS FROM an abandoned B-Movie graveyard, officials of the Reagan-Bush era are emerging from the dirt and showing up inside the George W. Bush administration. The latest resurrection is John Negroponte, whom Bush recently nominated as ambassador to the United Nations. …

U.S. military aid to Honduras jumped from $ 3.9 million in 1980 to $ 77.4 million by 1984. So crammed was the tiny country with U.S. bases and weapons that it was dubbed the *USS Honduras,* as if it were simply an off-shore staging ground.

The captain of this ship, Negroponte was in charge of the U.S. Embassy when, according to a 1995 four-part series in the *Baltimore Sun,* hundreds of Hondurans were kidnapped, tortured and killed by Battalion 316, a secret army intelligence unit trained and supported by the Central Intelligence Agency. … Members of Battalion 316 were trained in surveillance and interrogation at a secret location in the United States and by the CIA at bases in Honduras. …

Negroponte tried to distance himself from the pattern of abuses, even after a flood of declassified documents exposed the extent of U.S. involvement with Battalion 316. In a segment of the 1998 CNN mini-series *Cold War,* Negroponte said that "some of the retrospective effort to try and suggest that we were supportive of, or condoned the actions of, human rights violators is really revisionistic." …

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clergy in Central America during the '80s, was one of the few publications still questioning Negroponte's fitness.

In an April 2004 article, the magazine recounted a statement from Society of Helpers' Sister Laetitia Bordes, who had gone to Honduras and approached Negroponte about the "disappearances" of 32 women who had fled to Honduras after rightist death squads in El Salvador assassinated Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980.

Later, these women, including one who had been Romero's secretary, "were forcibly taken from their living quarters in Tegucigalpa, pushed into a van and disappeared," Sister Laetitia Bordes said. "John Negroponte listened to us as we exposed the facts. … Negroponte denied any knowledge of the whereabouts of these women. He insisted that the U.S. embassy did not interfere in the affairs of the Honduran government."

The National Catholic Reporter noted, "Years later, the *Baltimore Sun* would reveal that Negroponte apparently knew more than he was letting on. In fact, charge his many critics, the ambassador oversaw an exponential increase in military aid to the Honduran army, deceptively downplayed human rights violations, and played a key role in supporting the activities of Battalion 316, a CIA-backed Honduran-based regional counterinsurgency unit subsequently found to be among the cruelest of the cruel."

Many congressional Democrats, as well as Republicans, consider those two-decade-old concerns about Central America stale and irrelevant to Negroponte's nomination as the nation's first National Intelligence Director. But his tenure as ambassador to Honduras raises questions not only about his moral judgment and integrity, but his capacity to assess information and to ensure that political pressures don't influence intelligence reporting.

As the first person chosen to hold this post—with oversight responsibility for all U.S. intelligence activities—Negroponte might legitimately be expected to represent something other than tolerance of death squads and politicization of intelligence information. ■

for many years. Here is some of what we have reported.

Negroponte … annually filed State Department reports from Honduras that gave the impression that the Honduran military respected human rights. But in an interview with *In These Times,* Negroponte's predecessor as ambassador, Carter appointee Jack Binns, tells a different story: "Negroponte would have had to be deliberately blind not to know about human rights violations." … In the summer of 1981, Binns recalls, "I was called unexpectedly to Washington by Tom Enders, the assistant secretary of state. He asked me to stop reporting human rights violations through official State Department channels and to use back channels because they were afraid of leaks." … Binns did not agree to use back channels and when he returned to Honduras, he received no further reports of human rights violations from the CIA. "I was deliberately lied to," says Binns. …

The lessons Negroponte has learned from the past may shed light on what kind of U.N. ambassador he will be if his nomination is approved by the Senate. When he appeared in 1981 before a Senate committee for confirmation as envoy to Honduras, he said, "I believe we must do our best not to allow the tragic outcome of Indochina to be repeated in Central America."

The tragedy to which he referred, of course, was the defeat of the United States, not the devastation and death caused by U.S. intervention.

JUNE 21, 2004

Déjà Violence

By Joel Bleifuss

FOR ALL THE hooha over the horror of U.S. treatment of Iraqi prisoners, the fact is such torture has been the rule, not the exception. Indeed, this scandal features a cast of characters who were in power the last time the U.S. sanctioned torture. … Who could forget John Negroponte? Between 1981 and 1985, he was the U.S. ambassador to Honduras … overseeing the construction of El Aguacate airbase, which was used as a U.S. training camp for the Nicaraguan Contras and as a torture center for Battalion 316, a Honduran army intelligence unit. The *Baltimore Sun* reported in 1995 that Battalion 316, which was trained and supported by the CIA, used "shock and suffocation devices in interrogations. Prisoners often were kept naked and, when no longer useful, killed and buried in unmarked graves." In August 2001, a mass grave was unearthed at El Aguacate containing 185 corpses, including two Americans.



Negroponte will become the U.S. ambassador to Iraq in July. Judging by his record, he is the man for the job.

The use of torture by the Honduran army under U.S. guidance was not an aberration but a matter of policy. … The U.S. Army used CIA-prepared torture manuals to train foreign military officers both at the School of the Americas and on-site in Latin America. One of these, the *Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual -- 1983,* had these tips:

> The threat of coercion usually weakens or destroys resistance more effectively than coercion itself. For example, the threat to inflict pain can trigger fears more damaging than the immediate sensation of pain. … A threat should be delivered coldly, not shouted in anger. … If a subject refuses to comply once a threat has been made, it must be carried out. The torture situation is an external conflict, a conflict between the subject and his tormentor.

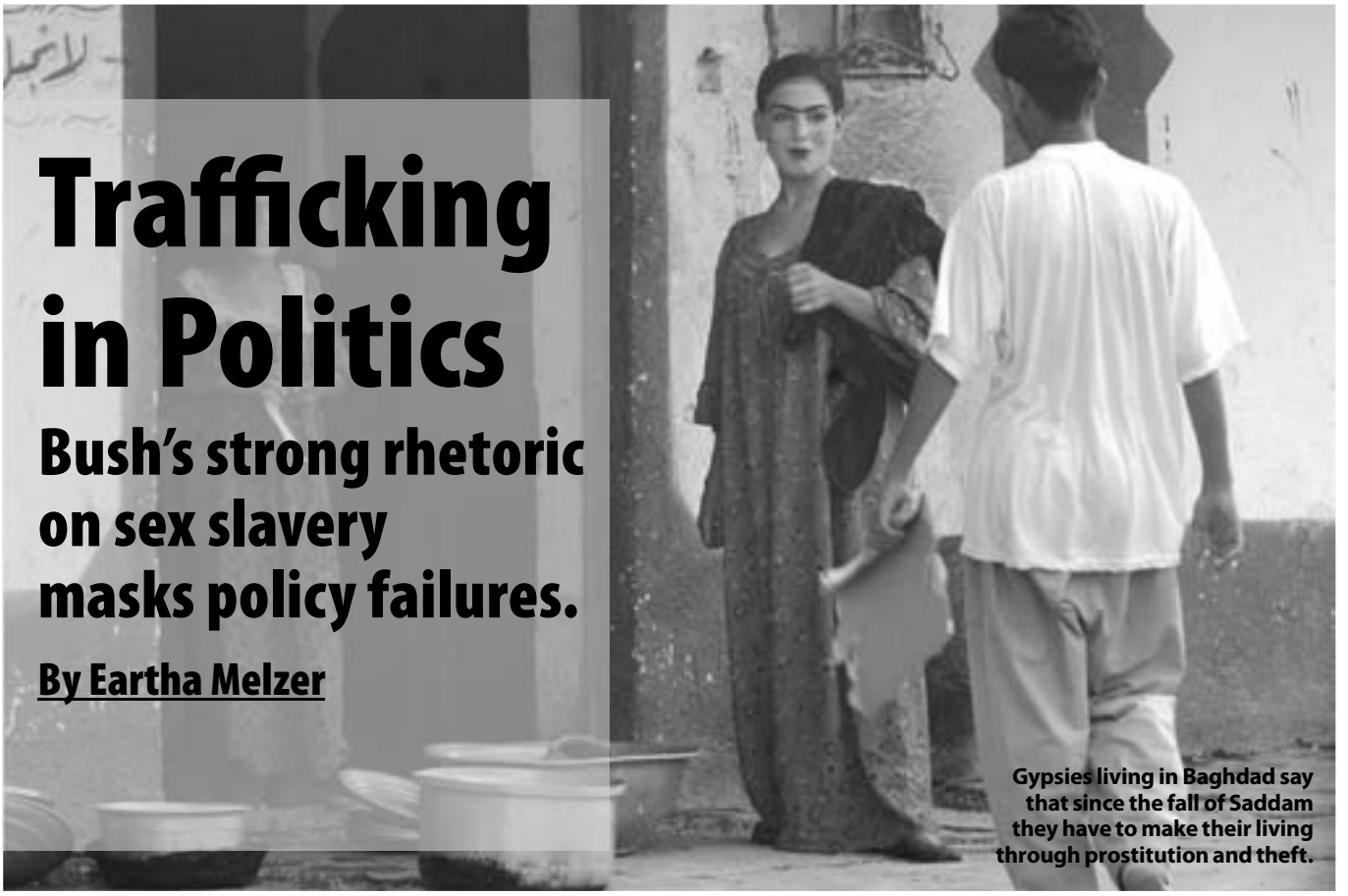
The CIA's training manual does caution, "The routine use of torture lowers the moral caliber of the organization that uses it and corrupts those that rely on it." Look no further than the Bush administration.

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Trafficking in Politics

Bush's strong rhetoric on sex slavery masks policy failures.

By Eartha Melzer



Gypsies living in Baghdad say that since the fall of Saddam they have to make their living through prostitution and theft.

George W. Bush seems to take one human rights campaign seriously—he decries human trafficking as "modern slavery" and a "special evil." Indeed, he used sex slavery to mobilize his evangelical base during the 2004 campaign.

The evangelicals are not alone. In 2000, they formed an uncommon coalition with feminist groups to lobby for a new law combating human trafficking. The resulting Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) set up minimum standards for all countries to meet in combating trafficking, and created the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons within the State Department.

But four years into the anti-trafficking program, both evangelicals and feminists are disappointed with the results. Commercial sexual exploitation of women is on the rise globally, and in many cases the United States is driving, not stopping, the trend. Countries with the most severe trafficking problems have been ignored, while others appear to have been targeted for political reasons. And the economic plight of women who sell sex for money has been overshadowed by a sensationalized rhetoric of sin and redemption.

A simplistic take on a complex problem

Regulating the global sex trade is no easy proposition. Prostitution is legal, with various caveats, in several countries, and international legal experts have developed elaborate definitions to distinguish between victims of coercion and adults who willingly exchange sex for money. The International Labour Organization, discussing the booming sex trade in Asia, recognizes, "In many cases, sex work is often the only viable alternative for women in communities coping with poverty, unemployment, failed marriages and family obligations in nearly complete absence of social welfare programs."

Bush, however, has eschewed the notion that sex workers have needs or agency, instead lumping together trafficking, prostitution and commercial sex as offenses against the "moral law that stands above nations." With the 2003 National Security Directive 22, Bush announced a "zero tolerance" policy for trafficking, including involvement in trafficking by U.S. service members. The directive also required that anti-trafficking funds be kept from groups that do not take an abolitionist approach to prostitution.

As with the administration's policies on illegal drugs, family planning and AIDS, the U.S. policy against trafficking does not focus on harm reduction. Funding preference is given to groups that forcibly remove women from prostitution. That means leaving out some of the organizations best situated to address problems faced by sex workers, like the Sonagachi project in India. This health project, for and by sex workers, has been recognized by the United Nations as a model program for stopping the spread of HIV and protecting the rights of

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people involved in the sex trade.

The Bush administration's absolutist approach bears strong similarities to American moral crusades of days past. In the early 20th century, industrialization and immigration fueled sensational stories of "defiled virgins," and a crusade against prostitution resulted in the 1910 passage of the White Slavery Traffic Act, which banned transporting women across state lines for "immoral purposes."

Nearly a century later, the media is rife with accounts that similarly depend on public prurience and stereotypes of women as victims. On January 25, 2004, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story by Peter Landesman titled "Sex Slaves on Main Street: the Girls Next Door." While this tale of large-scale trafficking of women and girls into the United States was quickly discredited, that didn't stop director Roland Emmerich, the man who brought us *Independence Day*, from optioning the film rights.

Double standards

Under TVPA, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has set up Human Trafficking Task Forces in cities around the country. A November 2004 DOJ press release, announcing a $450,000 anti-trafficking grant to the D.C. Metro Police Department's "highly experienced" prostitution unit, stated that the money would be used to arrest prostitutes and "work up the chain to apprehend traffickers."

Such an approach not only conflates human trafficking and prostitution, but could further persecute people working in the sex industry. Taina Bien-Aime, executive director of the New York-based feminist group Equality Now, explains that while TVPA provides for visas for trafficked women, in order to avoid prosecution and deportation any undocumented immigrant must cooperate in the prosecution of her trafficker. Obtaining this cooperation may prove difficult because the trafficked women are often from the same village as the trafficker and many fear repercussions to their families.

American prosecution of these crimes abroad seems decidedly less aggressive. The State Department has a mandate from Congress to issue annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports grading countries on their progress on stopping trafficking. "Tier 3" countries—those judged by the United States not to be making progress—face sanctions.

According to a source at the State Department, most Tier 3 countries are the ones that have poor relations with the U.S. government, such as North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela. Venezuela's ranking, for example, seems based more on its refusal to recognize the U.S. program than with the scope of trafficking there.

The selective attention to the seriousness of some countries' trafficking has angered conservatives. Gary Haugen is the director of International Justice Mission (IJM), a Christian group that has received millions of dollars in federal funds to work on trafficking. IJM infiltrates the sex trade in India and Thailand and conducts brothel raids, placing sex workers in homes for rescue and re-education.

In June 2002, Haugen told the Congressional Human Rights Caucus that "the State Department has rendered the standards of the act virtually meaningless," by placing India and Thailand in Tier 2. Although the sex trade is huge in these countries, Haugen said, virtually no one has been prosecuted for trafficking.

> As with the administration's policies on illegal drugs, family planning and AIDS, the U.S. policy against trafficking does not focus on harm reduction.

Adding injury to insult

Even worse, U.S. interventions around the world are contributing to the trafficking and exploitation of women. The State Department TIP report for 2003 noted that trafficking activities have increased in Afghanistan and Iraq as a consequence of instability brought on by armed conflict.

"As we have seen elsewhere," the report stated, "the demand for prostitution often increases with the presence of military troops, expatriates and international personnel who have access to disposable income."

On April 24, 2002, Ben Johnston, a helicopter mechanic for DynCorp in Bosnia, testified to Congress about DynCorp employees who were allegedly buying women and girls to keep in their homes as sex slaves. Yet, despite the president's "zero tolerance" directive and the development of laws that would hold contractors responsible for involvement in sex trafficking, DynCorp remains in good standing as a U.S. contractor, and in 2003 was awarded a no-bid contract to "re-establish police, justice and prison functions in post-conflict Iraq."

In 2002, media reports detailed how "courtesy patrol" units around U.S. bases in Korea were directing soldiers and tourists to locations where they could engage the services of sex workers, mainly women from Russia and the Philippines who were held captive and forced to have sex with soldiers. South Korean authorities estimated that their country's sex industry was worth $22 billion a year and involved 330,000 women.

Congress called for an investigation and on September 21, 2004, the House Armed Services Committee and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe held a forum titled "Enforcing U.S. Policies Against Trafficking in Persons: How is the U.S. Military Doing?"

The inspector general of the Defense Department, Joseph E. Schmitz, a Bush appointee charged with being the "eyes, ears and conscience of the Defense Department" on trafficking issues, failed to give specific information about his investigation. Instead, he delivered a paper at the hearing called "Examining Sex Slavery Through the Fog of Moral Relativism," which read in part:

> Whatever else one might say about sex slavery in the 21st century, these recent proactive measures taken by U.S. and Western leaders reaffirm the "moral truth" that prostitution and human trafficking fall within those "dissolute and immoral practices" envisioned by our Continental Congress when it prescribed a duty to "guard against and suppress" such practices through, *inter alia,* vigilance by leaders in "inspecting the conduct of all persons who are placed under their command."

At the same hearing, the duty of substantive analysis fell to lawyer Martina Vanderberg, a former researcher with Human Rights Watch. In contrast to Schmitz's—and Bush's—bombastic pronouncements, she testified that the loopholes for contractors have not been closed, that education programs have not yet yielded the participation of soldiers in identifying traffickers and that it is unclear how the zero tolerance policy is being implemented. ■

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An aggressive audit of la

UNDER

If union leaders are feeling a little paranoid about Bush's reelection, maybe it's because they really are being persecuted. Republicans have both ideological and strategic reasons for an offensive against labor. Attacking unions pleases both Bush's corporate friends and the movement's conservatives, and harasses the strongest grassroots political operation opposing the Republican right.

"There's been a strategy," says former Democratic Rep. David Bonior, now chairman of American Rights at Work. "It's not a conspiracy. They're very open. [Key conservative Republican strategist] Grover Norquist says they want to get rid of unions, to break the labor movement."

But the rights of all workers, not just union members and their organizations, are in jeopardy. Since Bush took office, the Labor Department has significantly reduced staff for enforcing employer violations of laws on labor standards (such as child labor, the minimum wage and overtime), occupational safety, and rights to organize—laws that are important for everyone employed in America.

Not that increasing the staff would help much if the Labor Department's treatment of Wal-Mart is the standard. The Labor Department recently fined Wal-Mart, a company with $285 billion in annual sales, a paltry $135,540—or less than $6,000 per violation—for breaking child labor laws. What's more, the department promised that its inspectors would give the company advance notice of future investigations.

Of course, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao may figure that there's no need to beef up enforcement if the laws are getting weaker. Republicans plan to follow up Bush's success last year in curtailing overtime protection with legislation that would make both overtime payments and the 40-hour week optional for employers.

But while protection of children and of worker health is being neglected, the Office of Labor-Management Standards, which investigates and audits labor unions, is thriving. This year 48 new positions and a 15 percent budget increase were granted to the office, and since Bush has been in office they have benefited from 94 new positions and a 60 percent overall increase in the budget. Last year the Labor Department began imposing extraordinarily detailed financial reporting requirements for unions and related institutions, like credit unions. Although the AFL-CIO is still pursuing a legal challenge to the rules, the new requirements—which far exceed those placed on corporations—have already eaten up dues that could have been spent on providing members with services. In addition, the reports expose details about union strategies that could be helpful to employers and political opponents.

"The real motivation was to saddle unions with expensive and time-consuming requirements to harass them and to provide the kind of ammunition that a Right to Work Committee researcher or Republican staffer would find very useful, but union members would find not useful at all," says AFL-CIO General Counsel Deborah Greenfield. "I don't think it's an accident that the head of the agency within the Department of Labor who came up with the rule, Don Todd, was head of research for the Republican National Committee."

While unions are harassed more systematically, there have been complaints that the NAACP and at least 60 tax-exempt groups

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abor unions is only one front in Republicans' multi-pronged attack.

R THE MICROSCOPE

BY DAVID MOBERG

have been investigated by the Internal Revenue Service because of their political activities—though the Treasury Department inspector general recently found no wrongdoing. And the *Los Angeles Times* reported on February 19 that Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, demanded tax and financial records from two organizations of state and local government environmental officials who had criticized Bush's Clear Skies legislation.

Of course, for workers, the threat of expensive union reporting requirements pales in comparison to Bush initiatives to privatize Social Security and make the federal tax system even more regressive. Also, Bush's proposed Medicaid cuts hit two groups of vulnerable workers: not only low-income individual aid recipients, including many employees of companies like Wal-Mart, but also many thousands of workers in nursing homes and hospitals whose pay ultimately comes from Medicaid.

In addition, the federal government is attacking the right of hundreds of thousands of Homeland Security and Defense Department workers to unionize, and Republican governors in Indiana and Missouri are curtailing workers' collective bargaining rights (see "The Midwest Union Rollback," March 14). The right is renewing its efforts to pass state and federal right-to-work laws that prohibit requiring employees in a unionized workplace to pay dues to unions. What's more, conservative Republicans in Arizona, California, Georgia, South Carolina and Oklahoma are also pushing restrictions on union political spending.

In California, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is trying to shift public employees' pensions from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan similar to a 401(k). Beyond jeopardizing public employees' retirement, it's a calculated attack on workers' power through pension funds, like CalPERS, that push for corporate reform.

Bush's NLRB

But perhaps the biggest assault on workers will be coming from the agency entrusted to promote collective bargaining, the National Labor Relations Board. After Bush was able to make his appointments to the NLRB—including its chairman, Robert Battista, management attorney for the union-busting Detroit newspapers in the '90s—the board began issuing a string of anti-union rulings. "They're not just failing to keep up with the times, but moving in the wrong direction," says Fred Feinstein, NLRB general counsel in the Clinton years. He argues that the Bush NLRB, more than past Republican boards, has adopted the viewpoint of the ardently anti-union National Right-to-Work Committee.

Jonathan Hiatt and Craig Becker, respectively general counsel and associate general counsel for the AFL-CIO, recently wrote, "The members of the board appointed by President Bush appear to be headed toward the most radical non-legislative contraction of employee rights in the agency's history." While restricting the rights of even non-union workers to seek help from coworkers to protect their rights at work, the Bush board has overruled or restricted the rights to form a union of many workers whose jobs are typical of the new, flexible economy, such as graduate teaching assistants, handicapped workers, artists' models and temporary employees.

The Bush board may also soon resolve a dispute about the definition of "supervisors." This is a critical question because supervisors are not eligible to join a union. Feinstein fears that the board will define supervisory positions in such an expansive way that 90 percent of nurses working in a nursing home could be prevented from unionizing. Meanwhile, with no clear definition, the board threw out a union election victory because a worker the board deemed a supervisor had argued for unionization.

Of course, having supervisors argue against a union—or far worse—is standard procedure. For example, in several recent cases where the employer threatened to close a factory if workers voted for the union, fired pro-union workers, offered bribes or selectively locked out pro-union workers, the board either found no violation by the employer or else imposed no special remedies. In one case, the employer did not provide the union the requisite full list of employees before the election, but the board said it was close enough and refused to call a new election. Adding insult to injury, the decision came seven years after the original attempt to organize.

An even bigger threat looms ahead. Increasingly, unions organize, as they did many years ago, by getting employers to recognize the union when a third party verifies that a majority of workers have signed union cards—a practice known as "card check." The board has now signaled that it may make such recognition illegal or at least permit union decertification elections immediately, rather than after at least one year under current rules.

In other cases, the board appears determined to narrow the scope of agreements that unions and management can reach before majority worker support is established. In February a regional NLRB director challenged an agreement between the Steelworkers and a manufacturing investment company to establish management neutrality during an organizing drive. Hiatt and Becker warn that if the board decides against neutrality agreements and majority card recognition, it may "place union representation effectively beyond the reach of most American workers." ■

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The Coming Pandemic

Plagued by corruption and short on resources, Cambodia may be incubating a deadly contagion.

BY JEHANGIR POCHA

Kok Chamkar, Cambodia—The death of Tit Sokhan from the bird flu here in January may seem inconsequential to anyone outside this idyllic farming village 120 miles southwest of the capital, Phnom Penh.

But given that Sokhan's brother died just before her from bird flu-like symptoms and that the World Health Organization (WHO) says Cambodia could have many more undetected bird flu cases, the likelihood of a global bird flu pandemic is increasing.

At a conference on bird flu that opened on February 23 at Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, Shigeru Omi, Western Pacific regional director of the WHO, said such a pandemic was "imminent," and urged the representatives of the 20 governments present to act swiftly to control the spread of the disease.

Today, a bird flu pandemic could kill about 180 million people according to Michael Olsterholm, an infectious disease expert at the University of Minnesota. While that seems high, the WHO's Omi has said that should a bird flu pandemic occur, 25 to 30 percent of the world's 6 billion-plus population could become infected.

What's worrying scientists the most is the possibility that the H5N1 virus that causes bird flu, which until now has mostly passed to humans from birds and other animals, could mutate and begin to pass from human to human. In a recent issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers from the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit in Ho Chi Minh City reported that the H5N1 virus was showing up in the feces of affected people.

The virus hasn't mutated yet, but Dr. Julie Gerberding, head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in late February that the likelihood that it will do so poses "the most important threat" to health throughout the world.



"It's all a rumor and I don't believe it's true," said Doung Ohn, 28, one of the chicken sellers. "There is no such disease and no one ever died of any bird flu."

The weakest link

First identified in Hong Kong in 1997, the bird flu is known to have spread to nine countries, including Cambodia's neighbors, China, Thailand and Vietnam.

So far official reports say the current bird flu outbreak has killed 12 people in Thailand and 29 in Vietnam, and only one, maybe two, in Cambodia. But health experts say they're worried that Cambodia might be the weak link in the region that precipitates

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a wider problem. The country's health services are limited and its population is uninformed about the risks they face.

Oi Ngoy, 47, is the father who bears the heavy burden of knowing his daughter, and possibly his son, were the first Cambodians to die of the bird flu. Although the story of his personal tragedy is well known in the area, its lessons are still not well understood—even by Oi Ngoy himself.

"They said [my daughter] died of this bird flu, but I still don't know what it is," Oi Ngoy said, as his daughter's husband stood silently beside him. "I'm worried about my family and the future. But I don't know what to do."

Over the last few months, the deadly H5N1 virus was clearly spreading in neighboring Thailand and Vietnam, and the WHO had warned countries in the region to take firm preventive steps. But Oi Ngoy and his neighbors say they'd received no warnings or information from the government.

So when the three dozen chickens Oi Ngoy kept around his traditional stilted house started to fall ill and die, he and his family thought nothing of eating them instead of burning them, as is recommended for birds thought to be contaminated by the H5N1 virus.

"We just plucked them and cooked them," he said. "No one told us not to."

A few days later, Oi Ngoy's 14-year-old son Tit Chiang fell ill.

"He had a fever and couldn't breathe normally so we took him to the hospital," Oi Ngoy said. "The doctors gave him two bags of saline solution [but] then they told us to take him home. They said maybe we'd done something to offend our ancestors, and we should make an offering to them."

Oi Ngoy dutifully complied, but on January 19 Tit Chiang died in his home. Whether he died of bird flu was never established, and his body was cremated.

Tit Sokhan, Oi Ngoy's 24-year-old daughter, rushed home when she heard of her brother's death. She'd been away at a clinic with her sick eight-month-old infant, who had a fever and respiratory problems. When she saw her brother's body, Oi Ngoy says, she hugged and wept over it. The funeral was the next day, and just after that Tit Sokhan came down with a fever as well.

This time, Oi Ngoy took his child across the border to Vietnam, just three miles away, where locals say health services are better and cheaper.

"But they said they couldn't do anything for her," Oi Ngoy said quietly. "She died on January 30."

Vietnamese authorities, who'd been on high alert after 11 people died of bird flu in the country in January, confirmed that Tit Sokhan had died of the disease.

"Some officials came here after that," Oi Ngoy said. "They took our blood and told the neighbors not to pass through my house. But people still passed by our house, [and] no one told us anything more."

While bird flu-affected Vietnam has culled 1.5 million chickens and ducks, only 100 chickens have been ordered killed in Cambodia.

Kong Ngoi, 35, who lives just around the corner from Ngoy, said that when his "pigs began falling sick and couldn't use their forelegs," and his "chickens were getting swollen eyes," he promptly sold them to another villager—who in turn took them across the border and sold them in Vietnam.

Recipe for disaster

It's this potentially deadly combination of public ignorance and official inefficiency that's leading health experts to worry.

"Cambodia's facing very significant challenges compared with other countries," said Jim Tulloch, the WHO representative in Phnom Penh. The government spends just $3 per capita per year for health and even with another $6 per capita being spent by international donors, "that's not enough to provide even a basic health service," he said.

Sok Touch, director of Communicable Disease Control in the Cambodian Ministry of Health, said the government is aware of the threat and is doing all it can. "We're training workers and teaching people how to identify sick birds and what needs to be done to avoid contact with sick and dead poultry," he said. "We've also set up a hotline for people to call if there's a suspected case so we can track any new outbreaks."

But it's not clear if such measures can really arm Cambodia against the threat of a pandemic. The country's administrative capabilities and public health services have remained frail and ineffective.

The grassroots impact of this is clear at the Angkor Chey Referral Hospital, about 30 miles northeast of Oi Ngoy's village. This is where smaller health clinics in the area send serious cases. Nieng Chantou, a medical assistant who, like most of the medical staff here, gets paid about $20 a month, said he wasn't sure what he could do if he had to treat someone with the bird flu.

"I missed attending the workshop on that," he said from a bench in the center of the hospital's leafy compound. "But I think my boss attended, and he said that if we get a patient we should isolate them." But Chantou said the hospital didn't have any isolation facilities. "We're very short of rooms, so we'd just have to put the patient, even though we know he has the symptoms of bird flu, in the same room as others," he said.

> Should a bird flu pandemic occur, 25 to 30 percent of the world's 6 billion-plus population could become infected.

Given the bird flu's 76 percent fatality rate in known cases, prevention is even more important than cure. But here, too, Cambodia is struggling.

In Phnom Penh, people are reasonably educated about the bird flu, and restaurants and shops say chicken consumption has fallen sharply. But in villages, few seem to know they're at risk.

In Tram Kok, a dusty highway town 25 miles northeast of Oi Ngoy's village, a group of chicken sellers sat along a shady side street surrounded by live but dazed-looking chickens and ducks tied together in clumps of six or eight. The birds lay about them in their own excrement, squawking and pecking at each other as the women arranged and rearranged them like bales of cloth. To fatten the birds before sale, some women were holding them by the neck and forcing clumps of gruel down their throats.

The exposure to the birds' blood and excrement make places like this prime breeding grounds for the bird flu. But the women said no government inspector had visited them in over a year and they didn't seem to care.

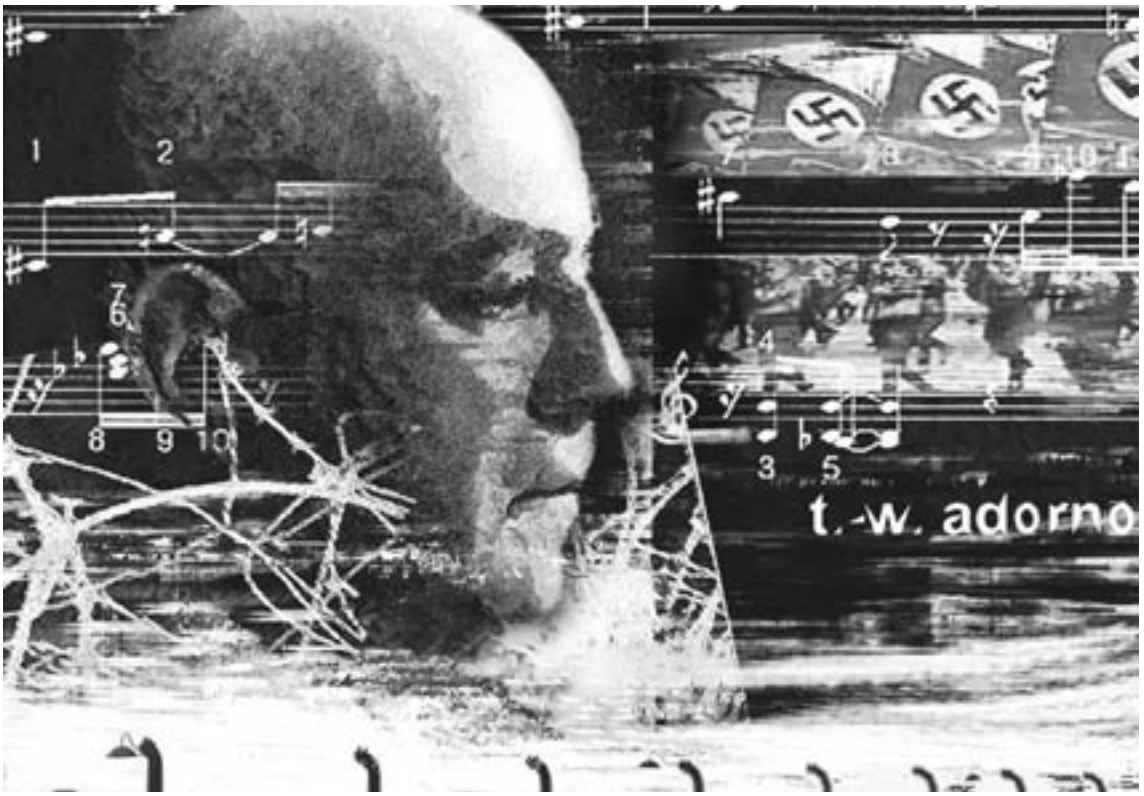
"It's all a rumor and I don't believe it's true," said Doung Ohn, 28, one of the chicken sellers. "There is no such disease and no one ever died of any bird flu." ■

JEHANGIR POCHA *is the Asia correspondent for* In These Times.

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Culture

28 Movies: ***Sunset Story*** is nice. Is that enough?
32 Behind enemy lines: infiltrating American Girl Place.



BY JAMIE DANIEL

Adorno as Antidote

The work of Theodor Adorno, the German-Jewish social and cultural theorist who died in 1969, isn't likely ever to become "popular." From the essays on modernist music written in the early days of the Third Reich before he was forced to seek exile in New York in 1938 to the series of densely complex studies of Kant and Hegel written after his postwar repatriation, he produced an intimidating body of work that has consistently provoked antipathy among anti-intellectuals on both the right and the left.

Born in Frankfurt in 1903 into a well-off secular Jewish family, Adorno grew up in a kind of hyper-acculturated environment that it is now difficult to imagine. Weekend afternoons were spent playing double-concertos on the family's two grand pianos; when he was in his teens, the family hired cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer to tutor the young Teddy in his study of Kant. There is no record anywhere of his ever having had to work for wages. He was a talented musician and for a time was a protégé of Vienna School composer Alban Berg. He decided instead to take a doctorate in philosophy, writing a dissertation on Kierkegaard.

On the eve of a promising career at his hometown university, he was stunned to find himself barred from teaching there because he was a Jew. Like so many other German Jews from privileged backgrounds, he seriously underestimated the threat posed by the Third Reich. Only considerable efforts by his friends

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convinced him to finally leave Germany in 1934.

But unlike other exiles such as Herbert Marcuse, who became a Californian, if not an American, Adorno never took to the United States. And it didn't take to him. Regularly criticized by fellow researchers in New York for acting "so foreign," he would be caricatured again posthumously by American cultural studies advocates of the '80s, who condemned him as the paradigmatic European elitist because of his aversion to what he derided as the "culture industry." Adorno famously loathed both American jazz and Hollywood movies, once declaring provocatively that he liked everything about the experience of going to the movies except what was on the screen.

Lisa Yun Lee's new scholarly study, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T. W. Adorno*, signals a welcome shift in the U.S. reception of this challenging theorist. Grounding her study not in the culture wars, but in the questions raised by

Dialectics of the Body
By Lisa Yun Lee
Routledge
197 pages, $65

feminism and other so-called identity-based scholarship, Lee gets beyond the usual reduction of Adorno's work to a face-off between mass-produced entertainment and the high modernist aesthetics he championed. Instead, she opens up a conversation on the much more important central focus of his work—its persistent analysis of the extraordinarily pernicious impact of capitalism, not just on popular culture but on our perception, our bodily experience and, ultimately, our capacity for humanity.

No one was better than Adorno at dissecting the psychic and emotional brutality of capitalism's regimes of commodification and the increasing pressure it exerts on individuals to define themselves through consumption. This, he argued, led to the compulsion to shut off one's capacity for empathy, whether with working people whose labor produces commodities (how could we shop at Wal-Mart otherwise?) or those whose homes, lives and futures are being sacrificed in the name of a market-friendly abstraction called "Iraqi freedom."

Adorno referred to this "shut off" compulsion in refreshingly severe terms, calling it "the mechanism of psychic mutilation upon which present conditions depend for their survival." As Lee suggests, he surely would have had much to say about our contemporary equivalent of proto-Nazi "body culture," in which such perverse phenomena as full-body cosmetic "extreme makeovers" have moved from creepy evidence of psychopathology to prime-time entertainment.

Thus, those who assume that Adorno was politically conservative because he didn't like American mass culture don't look closely enough at *why* he didn't like it—they miss the deep ideological interconnectedness he traced between subjectivity, consumption, production, the conditions of possibility for empathy and, with this, political agency. Because he saw these questions as interconnected, his work can be very hard to read. Yes, it is stylistically complex to an extent that can repel even those who agree with his analysis—"Critique of Capitalism for Dummies" this is not. But I would argue that the complexity is necessary to accommodate his consistent constellations of concerns.

As was the case for the late Edward Said, Adorno did not consider his responsibilities or values as a cultural critic in any way separable from those that obliged him to intervene in public debates over politics and social questions, especially after his repatriation in post-war Germany. He intentionally blurred the distinctions we've come to expect between, say, essays on culture and works of sociology, philosophy or political commentary.

Adorno examined the phenomenon of highly commodified mass culture not to get people to read Beckett rather than go to the movies (although he clearly wished we would). Rather, it was a site he could use to expose the seepage of what SUNY professor Rosemary Hennessy has termed "capitalo-normativity" into every aspect of modern life.

In one of the autobiographical essays he wrote before his death, Said wrote, "Those of us who are American intellectuals owe it to our country to fight the coarse anti-intellectualism, bullying, injustice and provincialism that disfigure its career as the last superpower." As a German intellectual who survived his own country's catastrophic attempt at empire, Adorno provides us with a valuable counter-model to the dumbing down of public discourse upon which the Bush administration relied to win the last presidential election, and upon which its "bullying and provincial" foreign policy depends.

Lee's book, which engages this work with a generous combination of critical intelligence and compassion, provides us with ample reasons to accept that challenge. ■

JAMIE DANIEL *is the Director of Organizing and Development at UPI Local 4100, IFT/AFT and a co-chair of the Chicago Center for Working Class Studies.*

ART SPACE



Carlos A. Cortez, artist, activist and poet died at his home in Chicago on January 18. His legacy reflects a lifetime of political engagement, from IWW posters to silk-screen T-shirt art such as "Before the Disappearance," which Cortez designed to promote solidarity with the wives and mothers of Guatemala's disappeared. Learn more about Carlos Cortez at www.rebelgraphics.org/carloscortez.html.

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***Sunset Story* reemphasizes the old cliché that the older you are, the more your life becomes about dying.**

BY PAT DOWELL

Nice Isn't Enough

It's not the usual retirement home that has residents who want—or are allowed—to attach hand-scrawled "Free Mumia" placards outside their doors, but that's typical at Sunset Hall. ¶ The motto "A Home for Free-Thinking Elders is emblazoned on the side of the hall's bus, which might be taking them to a demonstration against the transit authority in Los Angeles or to a peace rally, instead of just down to the doctor's office. In addition to the usual food complaints ("We didn't get a single fresh peach this summer"), snatches of mealtime conversation include passing references to politics—"It wasn't a revolution, people just stormed the parliament," a resident is overheard explaining.

Sunset Story, the documentary that explores this unique institution, stays close and intimate with two residents of Sunset Hall: Irja Lloyd, a retired teacher, and Lucille Alpert, a former social worker. Arriving at Sunset Hall within two weeks of each other, they struck up a supportive friendship that both consider lifesaving. Their personalities, sturdy and often comic, carry the film. Lloyd is earnest and tireless in her wheelchair, checking on all the employees to make sure they register to vote. She is determined to create a Jewish New Year celebration for her friend Alpert, who goes along somewhat grudgingly because she says she was raised to assimilate. Alpert points out that she has never even heard of the customs Lloyd assiduously digs up and enacts. For her part, Alpert has a keen and understated wit. As the two coordinate plans for a walker lap around the hall's refreshing inner courtyard, she says as dryly as any British comic, "I'm so excited."

Sunset Story
Directed by Laura Gabbert

The two make an engaging pair, but they won't change your ideas about aging and the aged, as the film's publicity suggests, unless, say, you have lived all your years in Paris Hilton-style oblivion to real life. The documentary does not lapse into "aren't-they-cute" condescension, but it does seem overcome by that other pervasive cliché about growing older—that the older you are, the more your life is about dying.

The film's march toward death became unavoidable once filmmaker Laura Gabbert chose to hone in on two individual personalities, one of whom receives a diagnosis of terminal cancer. This is handled with tasteful restraint, except for some lapses with music to underline how sad it all is.

On the filmmakers' Web site (www.sunsetstory.org), Gabbert says she set out to make a portrait of Sunset Hall, but instead decided to hone in on the story of the friendship between Alpert and Lloyd. She wanted the film to have "the feeling of a character-driven narrative film." Screens big and small are overrun with narrative films, both nonfiction and fiction, and most of them are character-driven, if not always with characters as interesting as these two. Our commodity-and-entertainment-driven society often tries to bury history prematurely; the free-thinking seniors at Sunset Hall, trained in activism, would surely insist on the importance of placing a narrative within its political and social context.

To be generous to the filmmakers, *Sunset Story* seems a little squeezed into its 53-minute PBS time slot, cut down from the 73 minutes at which it played festivals and won awards. I hope that's the explanation for what's missing: more about how Alpert and Lloyd live in Sunset Hall, as well as the 82-year-history of the Hall, which includes what the *LA Weekly* termed a "residents' coup" in 1989 to prevent sale of the building to a developer, and another disagreement with the Board of Directors during a financial crisis in 2003.

And what kind of neighbor is Sunset Hall among the Koreans and Latinos with whom it shares its mid-Wilshire location in Los Angeles? What are the hall's employment policies in an infamously pinchpenny and corner-cutting sector of the health industry? Somewhere between undistracted narrative and dry recitation of statistics, there must be a way to tell the full story of individuals, including the politics of the surroundings in which they live to their dying day.

Someday I'll be a "free-thinking elder" (I hope), and these are things I want to know about now, in addition to seeing a touching vignette of friendship and continuing activism. ■

PAT DOWELL *is an independent film journalist and critic whose stories have been heard on NPR since 1987.*

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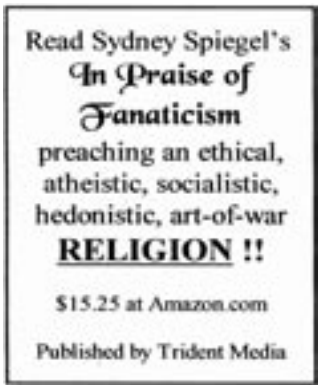
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American Girl

Continued from back page

These cards can be stowed in small maroon folders courtesy of American Girl Place, imprinted with the phrase "Pocket full of wishes." It's a brilliant scheme. These hopeful "wishes" can then be brought to the nearest cash register or, as the folders brightly suggest, carried home as souvenirs. When flipped over, the cards offer an 800-number for easy ordering.

All of this is engineered to shield the girls from the pettiness of cash. Despite the phenomenal investment (dolls start at $96, outfits around $30), American Girl products teach a wholesome version of history and attempt to instill an early sense of self-worth into young lives. At the same time the company capitalizes on one of the most lucrative markets in existence: kids. They influence more than $600 billion of household spending in the United States every year, and simple cultural observation tells us that girls, especially offspring of divorced, regretful fathers, inspire more than half of this spending.

Although Pilsen residents, Latina doll collectors and three generations of women who've grown up with American Girl dolls were shocked by Mattel's blatant plug for placid suburban culture, it should come as no surprise. Mattel's hope is to create a fantasy that will perpetuate—well, Mattel. Following the marketing strategies of the cola giants who have secured exclusive pouring rights deals with public schools and the viral marketing campaigns perpetrated by tobacco companies, Mattel is raising a nation of American Girl addicts. And like the purveyors of caffeine and nicotine, American Girl Place—and its books, films and toys that are helping shape American female culture—demands equal scrutiny.

"Why not go there," I thought, "and see if these young shoppers want more from their role models than an array of outfits?"

American Girl Project: Operation Pocket Full of Wishes consisted of eight cards that mimicked those shopping aides found in the store. These cards were emblazoned with the wishes of real girls that I had actually spoken to: equal pay for equal work; domestic partnership benefits; self-confidence; healthy body images; safe and effective birth control; ample career opportunities; safe, legal abortion access; and free tampons.

On the mock cards, I labeled these intangible but important "products" with the phrase "not pictured" and priced them at $0. On the back, the American Girl 800-number was listed with the suggestion to try ordering these things over the phone. I dropped these cards into the "Pocket full of wishes" sleeves and returned them to the slots at American Girl Place from whence they had originally come.

Unfortunately, they were discovered by a store clerk and not by an amused parent or delighted child. I was removed to the street and told, in the words of one Chicago police officer, to never again "commit your little freedom of speech thing" on the American Girl Place premises.

"So I just want to be clear," I said. I knew I was provoking him, but—like Kaya, American Girl's Nez Perce Indian girl doll (circa 1764) who can't keep her mouth shut when there's a point to be made—I was unable to stop myself: "American Girl Place does not support freedom of speech?"

It was confusing: I had committed neither crimes nor acts of civil disobedience. I had remained polite and compliant. And I was unable to locate a single Mattel employee who disagreed with the content of my messages. My offense seems to have been spreading noncommercial messages in a capitalist environment.

The cost of this crime? Intimidation, interrogation, a healthy frisking, two hours of detainment, a full background check and the undivided attention of several on-duty Chicago police officers, who were called upon to ensure that American girls were kept safely away from the dangerous notion that they should grow up to earn as much money as their male counterparts in whatever profession they chose.

Four members of the Chicago Police Department flanked me as I was released from the interrogation room, and formed a line in front of the small crowd of shoppers who were watching. This row of officers, covered in bulletproof attire and weaponry, seemed to frighten the watching girls. I smiled and waved so they wouldn't be scared.

Compared to American Girl Place, Pilsen doesn't seem so dangerous after all. ■

ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE *is the author of* Hey Kidz, Buy This Book! *She teaches at Columbia College-Chicago and University of Illinois at Chicago and is the associate publisher of* Punk Planet *and Punk Planet Books. Find out more about Operation Pocket Full of Wishes at pocketfullofwishes.blogspot.com.*



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Operation Pocket Full of Wishes

Cultural intervention at American Girl Place

BY ANNE ELIZABETH MOORE



IN EARLY FEBRUARY, Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood was enraged. Marisol Luna had left the danger-ridden urban area, complaining of gangs and rampant poverty, for the squeaky-clean suburbs, and 95 percent of all preteen girls in the United States knew it.

Those girls idolize Marisol Luna: They want to be just like her. They want to dress like her, wear their hair like her, read about her life. They want to own her, but more importantly, they want to *be* her. Luckily for them, Mattel's American Girl brand—to which Marisol Luna was recently added—has made this possible.

The brand's allure is best encapsulated in American Girl Place, a three-floor testament to the lucrative youth market just off of Chicago's Michigan Avenue. The American Girl experience allows girls between the ages of 7 and 13 to have their fantasies play out before their eyes.

Here, their dolls' stories are elaborated and corroborated. The dolls are given a history, told through boutique-style shopping areas, a theater showing plays based on the brand's fictionalized historical novels, video monitors playing *Samantha: An American Girl Holiday*, and several glass-encased, museum-like tableaux. Girls can pick dolls whose eye and hair color match theirs, and whose historical and contemporary storylines—like Marisol's—present a range of prepackaged appeals. They can even buy outfits that match, taking identification with a product to a new and disturbing level.

At American Girl Place, even shopping is re-envisioned: Shoppers grab small cards that sport full-color pictures, a brief description and, of course, the price of the desired doll or accessory.

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